

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

---

### Witness Statement

---

**TESTIMONY OF  
CAPTAIN TED I. LILLESTOLEN  
DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR  
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE  
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
JUNE 8, 2000**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee for this opportunity to appear before you today to testify on House Resolution 415, a measure expressing the sense of the House of Representatives in support of establishing a National Ocean Day. The Administration is pleased to support the spirit of this resolution sponsored by the Honorable Patsy Mink of Hawaii, particularly since this is the 30th anniversary of my agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and because today, June 8, is in fact World Oceans Day, a day that has been celebrated across the world since its declaration at the Earth Summit in 1992.

People have long relied on the oceans as a major source of food, other resources, transportation, and recreation. But much of our knowledge of the ocean--including its biology, chemistry, physics, and geology--has been learned only recently in the last half century. Even now we are just beginning to unravel and understand the essential role the oceans play in regulating climate and weather. And, despite our expanded efforts, it is estimated that today less than five percent of the ocean floor has been mapped. As our understanding increases so does our appreciation for the importance of the ocean to our security and well being. In light of the fact that more than two-thirds of our planet is covered by ocean, and considering the dynamic role the ocean plays in supporting all life on the planet, it is entirely appropriate that a day be established acknowledging its importance to our Nation and its citizens.

The Administration has undertaken a leadership role in promoting improved understanding and stewardship of the ocean and marine resources. In 1998, during the International Year of the Ocean, the Administration sponsored the National Ocean Conference in Monterey, California. Attended by more than 800 representatives and experts from all levels of government, industry, academia and non-profit organizations, the conference raised awareness of the importance of our ocean resources and provided increased focus and attention on several critical concerns. In 1999 we followed up and published the interagency report, *Turning to the Sea: America's Ocean Future*, which highlighted these concerns and developed a strategy to address them.

But more important than conferences and papers, the Administration has taken concrete actions to meet the challenges that were raised and chronicled at these meetings and in the subsequent report. Most recently, on May 26th President Clinton visited Assateague Island National Seashore and announced three specific strategies to protect America's beaches, coasts and oceans. He issued an Executive Order directing the federal agencies to strengthen protection of ocean and coastal resources by creating a comprehensive network of marine protected areas. The Order establishes a Marine Protected Area Center within my agency, NOAA, and calls for protecting areas representative of the diverse marine ecosystems within U.S. waters. The same Order directs the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce pollution of beaches, coasts, and oceans by strengthening water quality protections for marine waters. The President also directed the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior, in cooperation with the State of Hawaii, to develop a plan to permanently protect the coral reefs of the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, which represent nearly 70 percent of the coral reefs in U.S. waters.

In addition to these latest actions, many of the other steps being taken by the Administration are interagency efforts, such as the work of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, Invasive Species Council, and the Lands Legacy, Clean Water Action Plan, and Natural Disaster Reduction initiatives. Other actions involve partnerships with academia and other research institutions, including the National Ocean Partnership Program, Sea Grant, and increased funding for the National Science Foundation for ocean science. I would like to take a moment to highlight some of these efforts and proposals primarily from the perspective of NOAA.

Hurricane season officially opened June 1st and experts are predicting another active year. In cooperation with other agencies, NOAA is working to reduce the risks of injury and property loss from coastal hazards, especially hurricanes and tropical storms. The Administration has requested \$110 million in its 2001 budget to support the Natural Disaster Reduction Initiative by sustaining the modernization of the National Weather Service and improving satellite coverage and related support.

For its part of the Lands Legacy Initiative, NOAA has requested an additional \$263 million primarily to boost support for coastal states through coastal zone management grants, and to provide additional funding for the National Marine Sanctuary Program and National Estuarine Research Reserve System. Also included in this request is \$9 million to implement the recommendations of the Coral Reef Task Force for increased research and protection of coral reefs, as well as increased funding for Pacific Salmon recovery efforts.

Just a few weeks ago, Dr. Baker--along with Rear Admiral Paul Gaffney of the Office of Naval Research and Admiral James Watkins (retired) the head of the Consortium for Oceanographic Research and Education--testified at a joint hearing including this subcommittee to discuss interagency efforts to enhance ocean observations. NOAA's primary interest in this regard is improving our capabilities to conduct and provide longer-term ocean and climate observations, predictions, and services. Our 2001 budget proposal includes a request for an additional \$28 million for the Climate Observations and Services Initiative and an additional \$9 million specifically for improved ocean observations.

For FY 2001, NOAA also has requested increases of \$1.6 million for its part in the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Initiative and \$6.9 million for the Clean Water Action Plan Initiative, primarily to address the serious impacts of nonpoint pollution and harmful algal blooms in our coastal waters. In support of the America's Ocean Future Initiative, NOAA has requested increases totaling \$51.6 million for its navigation, fisheries, seafloor observatories, aquaculture and related ocean stewardship programs.

Mr. Chairman, clearly the 1998 Year of the Ocean was an effective mechanism for enhancing the visibility of the oceans and the importance of supporting the Nation's ocean stewardship programs. The Administration is taking actions to implement the commitments it made to address the challenges we face along our coasts and in our exclusive economic zone. We have redoubled our efforts to fulfill our responsibilities to play a leadership role in researching, managing and protecting our ocean resources for this and future generations.

Establishing a National Ocean Day will provide an annual reminder of the importance of the oceans. It could serve to reinvigorate everyone involved in ocean research and marine resource conservation. It also could help promote increased public awareness and education about the oceans. From this perspective, establishing a National Ocean Day is worthy of consideration and support.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for your leadership and commitment to the oceans. Like me, I suspect that for you everyday is ocean day. I would be happy to answer any questions you or another member of the Committee may have.

# # #